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SOURCE La Cote d'IvoireSOVIET MILITARY FORCES IN THE FAR EAST

European public opinion is concerned about the threat posed to the Western European nations within the Atlantic Pact by the numerically great effectiveness of the Soviet Union; however, it is not sufficiently aware of the US government's preoccupation with the size and organization of the Soviet forces stationed in the Far East.

In Eastern Siberia, the USSR has reinforced and modernized the troops it had in the area at the end of World War II, and has also made great efforts to develop industry and reduce the need to bring in supplies from Europe. There is coal in the Lena Valley as well as iron and oil in Khabarovsk, on Sakhalin Island, and near Petropavlovsk on Kamchatka. Many more Europeans are settling in the area, and convict labor is freely available. The Trans-Siberian Railroad has been double-tracked; to avoid the need of going through Chinese territory, a railroad line has been built which goes around the northern shore of Lake Baykal, passes to the north of the Amur River, reaches the Pacific coast 350 kilometers north of Vladivostok, and then comes into that great military port.

Ground forces are divided between two military districts. To the east is the Far East Military District with headquarters in Khabarovsk city; it comprises the lower valley of the Amur River, Primorskiy Kray, Port Arthur, Sakhalin Island, the Kurile Islands, and all of northeastern Siberia up to Bering Strait.

The Far East Military District has about 20 infantry, mechanized, or armored divisions (among which the proportion of mechanized or armored units tends to increase), 3 heavy artillery divisions (at least one of them motorized), at least one antiaircraft artillery brigade, 8 or 10 motor transport brigades, and railway, engineering, signal communications, and other troops.

The Maritime Military District, with headquarters in Vladivostok, has 6 infantry brigades, one motorized heavy artillery division, about 15 antiaircraft batteries, and a corresponding proportion of technical troops.

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Port Arthur and Dairen are garrisoned by one infantry division each. Sakhalin Island and the Kurile Islands, where the Japanese-built fortifications have been completed, are held by one infantry division and three fortifications brigades. Northeastern Siberia, because of its many forced-labor camps full of political deportees, is occupied solely by special security troops of the MVD and detachments of border guards.

The Transbaykal Military District, to the west, comprises the upper valley of the Amur River and the area between Lake Baykal and Manchuria. In it there are 14 infantry divisions, 7 mechanized divisions, 6 armored divisions, one motorized heavy artillery division, 1 anti-aircraft artillery regiments, and security troops and border guard.

Finally, Soviet troops in the Mongolian People's Republic consist of two infantry divisions, three mechanized divisions, and three cavalry divisions. The Mongolian Army, which is staffed to a large extent by Soviet officers, comprises 3 infantry brigades, 10 cavalry divisions, one anti-aircraft artillery regiment, and 30,000 border guards.

The Soviet air forces in the Far East and throughout northern Siberia must have at their disposal about 100 airfields and between 4,000 and 5,000 military aircraft of all categories. Civil aviation, under the command of a general, includes a large number of air lines crisscrossing all of Siberia. During World War II, it was taken over for military service, with the exception of the equipment essential to the operation of the lines. The crews are specially trained in all-weather flying.

During World War II, a large proportion of the aircraft turned over to the USSR by the US was flown by Soviet pilots from Alaska across Siberia into Europe. A movement in the opposite direction is quite feasible. Soviet civil aviation would be an important factor if the USSR became involved in war in the Far East.

The Soviet Navy has at its disposal the great port of Vladivostok and the port of Petropavlovsk on the coast of Kamchatka. These, as well as the Kurile Islands and the Sakhalin coast, are accessible even in winter through the use of icebreakers. Port Arthur and the commercial port of Dairen are accessible throughout the year. The Soviet fleet in the Pacific used to be almost completely isolated from European waters, but the Soviet government has been able, with the help of the icebreaker, aviation, and its weather service, to open for at least a considerable part of the year the sea lane along the northern coast of Siberia.

In the Pacific the USSR has several cruisers and destroyer squadrons as well as many submarines, the total number of which is undetermined. The Soviet war fleet is the world's second in tonnage, with between 300 and 350 submarines, and can play an important role in the Pacific as well as in European waters.

The presence of Soviet ground forces in the Far East enables the USSR to engage in powerful operations there, even if Mao Tse-tung's China were to become hostile to it -- a development which is utterly improbable in the near future. On the other hand, it would take the USSR a very long time to move into Europe the approximately 50 divisions (infantry, mechanized, or armored), the numerous artillery, and the technical troops which it has in the Far East. The same would apply to its troops in Western Siberia and to those which, in order to police the country and because of the existing political situation, it must maintain in Turkestan and the Caucasus. The latter can be estimated to be at least 30 divisions.

At the outset of a war in Europe, the USSR could count on hardly one half of its ground forces. To this might be added between 70 and 80 divisions from the Satellite armies, but the usefulness of these remains to be seen. Their equipment, furnished almost entirely by the USSR, is constantly improving, but their

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morale is an unknown factor. Their zest in putting down the more or less serious disturbances which have occurred in practically all the Satellite countries and in East Germany has been mediocre, and they have often had to appeal to the Soviet occupation forces or the special police units. The Soviet troops themselves have not always been proof against failure. This is a little-understood factor which bears watching.

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